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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BASHIR RESHUFFLES CABINET: ALI MARDI OUT, AL-JAZ
AND AL-ZUBEIR SWITCH PLACES

REF: KHARTOUM 147

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On February 14, President Bashir shifted more than a quarter of ministerial positions in the cabinet of the Government of National Unity (GNU). In particular, local observers believe that Awad Al-Jaz' shift from Energy to Finance Ministry will strengthen both his own influence and the performance of his new ministry. Two of those demoted (from Finance and Interior) were outspoken hardliners in the National Congress Party. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On February 14, President Omar Al-Bashir shuffled Sudan's Council of Ministers, naming eight (out of a total of 30) new cabinet ministers and four state ministers. Most significantly, controversial Justice Minister Mohammed Ali Marhdi was removed from the cabinet, Interior Minister al-Zubeir Bashir Taha (a particular thorn in the side of the SPLM) was demoted to Agriculture, and Finance Minister al-Hassan and Energy Minister Al-Jaz traded positions. President Bashir stated that the reshuffle was intended to reactivate the GNU as Sudan enters a period of political activity, including elections scheduled for 2009.

¶3. (U) Cabinet and state minister appointments are listed below, along with their previous positions:

Ministers:

Minister of Justice - Abdul Basit Salih Sabdarat (most recently Minister of Federal Governance, Sabdarat served as Justice Minister in 1998)

Minister of Interior - Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid (previously Governor of Kassala state)

Minister of Finance and National Economy - Awad Ahmed Al-Jaz (previously Minister of Energy and Mining)

Minister of Energy and Mining - al-Zubeir Ahmed al-Hassan (previously Minister of Finance and National Economy)

Minister of Federal Governance - LTG Abdul Rahman Said (previously Minister of Science and Technology)

Minister of Science and Technology - Ibrahim Ahmed Omer (previously advisor to President Bashir on media matters)

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry - al-Zubeir Bashir Taha (previously Minister of Interior)

Ministry Animal Resources and fisheries - Mohammed Ahmed al-Tahir Abu Kalabish (previously State Minister of Education)

State Ministers:

State Minister of Investment - Salman Suleiman al-Safi (previously State Minister of Foreign Trade)

State Minister of Foreign Trade - al-Semaih al-Saddiq (previously State Minister of Investment)

State Minister of Health - Hassan Abu Ayesha (previous position unknown)

State Minister of Higher education and Scientific Research - Fathi Mohammed Khalifa (previously State Minister of Health)

14. (SBU) Ali Mardi has become the focus of criticism for the slow pace with which the GNU has tackled legislative changes needed for national elections in 2009 and required by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, notably a new National Security Law and the Police Law. A member of the Umma Party, President Bashir's National Congress Party may have regarded him as expendable. Sabdarat, his replacement as Justice Minister, has a reputation for being compliant, ambitious, and has served in various capacities in the government since 1989. The now former Ministers of Finance (Al-Hassan) and Interior (Taha) were outspoken hardliners who frequently went beyond stated regime policy in criticizing the United States and the NCP's partner in government, the SPLM.

FROM ENERGY TO FINANCE MINISTRY

15. (SBU) On February 17, Abdelmoneim Mustafa El Amin, Executive Secretary at the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC) and

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former Sudanese Ambassador to Japan, told econoff that "This re-shuffling is all that people have been talking about." El Amin

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was most interested in the changes to the Ministry of Energy and Mining and the Ministry of Finance, saying that reforming the Ministry of Finance is the most likely reason for the change. He stated that "Al-Jaz's sphere of influence will expand while the incompetent and noxious Zubair Al-Hassan will still be a figurehead.

Both ministries will be functionally controlled by Awad Al-Jaz." El Amin added that other reasons, including a personal rivalry between Al-Jaz and Al-Hassan may have been responsible the change. According to El Amin, the position at the Ministry of Finance is more important than the position at the Ministry of Energy and Mining, and Al-Jaz is being rewarded for developing Sudan's petroleum.

16. (U) Editorials and press reports agreed that Al-Jaz will reform the Ministry of Finance. MuhammadLatif in "Al-Sudani" opened his article stating, "The first joke to follow the announcement of a cabinet reshuffle is 'After Al-Jaz extracted all of Sudan's oil, he decided to move to the Ministry of Finance to control the oil revenues!' According to Latif, the former Minister of Finance, Zubair Al-Hassan, was known as someone who liked to please everyone and that the Ministry of Finance was always full of people coming to ask for special favors and requests. He said that Al-Jaz will end that and make the Ministry of Finance a more efficient, modern, and effective institution.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Al-Jaz's appointment as Finance Minister comes after his successful tenure as Oil and Gas Minister and is the most recent of several measures over the last two months -- including the removal of an inefficient undersecretary and introduction of a modern and transparent budget format (reftel) -- intended to strengthen the Finance Ministry. However, this appointment will do little to ease Southern suspicions of lack of transparency in revenue sharing, as Al-Jaz now will be responsible for all of the GoS's finances, rather than only oil revenues. The changes do seem to decrease somewhat the power of some hardliners within the cabinet, but there are many others within the Sudanese regime with similar views.

